



Houston Middle School

District: Houston R-I School District

Enrollment: 227

Grade Range: 6-8



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The Houston Middle School is devoted to meeting the unique developmental needs of young adolescents. To accomplish this, the Middle School offers a challenging but nurturing atmosphere which places high expectations on student development. The area of academic achievement and social development will be stressed by providing specific programs and services designed to foster “Success for All.”

Houston Middle School, located in the rural community of Houston, Missouri, is the only middle school in the Houston R-I School District. The district encompasses approximately 22 square miles in central Texas County, which is located in the south central part of the state. In the past few years, three prominent factories relocated their businesses outside the Houston area, resulting in an increasing rate of unemployment. With an average family income of \$14,000, Houston is an economically deprived community, which results in a large at-risk population. More than half (59 percent) of the middle school population is eligible for free and reduced price lunches.

A Teaching Staff Committed to Excellence

Declining enrollment due to lost jobs in the community, coupled with a reduction in state funding, has forced the Houston R-I district to reduce staff and eliminate programs in recent years. Despite the impact on programs and services available for Houston Middle School students, the teaching staff has maintained its dedication to providing quality education. The district's financial struggle has served as a catalyst in uniting teachers in a collaborative effort to overcome challenges. They have remained focused on the school's mission and educational philosophy, working together to develop programs and services that will ensure that all students are successful.

“BEST PRACTICE IN ACTION...”

- ***Sporting Chance*** – Houston Middle School students with special needs participate in Sporting Chance, an event much like Special Olympics. Participants have the choice to compete with other schools in basketball, track and field, and bowling.
- ***Study Groups for Teachers*** – Houston Middle School teachers have organized study groups to develop new strategies and practices for teaching. Groups meet regularly and have discussions about their studies.

Focus on Reading and Writing

Reading and writing have been a primary focus of Houston Middle School for three years. Both reading and English classes have worked to coordinate lessons so curriculum is introduced in one class and reinforced in the other. With focus on reading improvement, Houston Middle School has increased a semester reading class for sixth grade students to a full year, added a seventh grade reading class to the core requirements, and adopted the Accelerated Reader program. Both reading and English teachers provide writing prompts based on world events, and writing is encouraged in other subject areas, as well, as teachers design lessons that require students to use higher order thinking skills and writing.

With a deliberate focus on reading and writing, Houston Middle School students' reading achievement has flourished. During the 1999 and 2000 school years, an average of 63.5 percent of seventh grade students scored at the Proficient level and above on the MAP assessment. By 2003, the percent of students scoring at the Proficient level and above jumped to 78 percent.

“WORDS OF WISDOM”

- **“When using differentiated instruction, the traditional way of testing, in all probability, may not be the best way to assess what the students have learned.”**
- **“...it is vital to teach students to think aloud, to make mistakes and then to correct them, to change their minds, and most importantly, to think outside the box.”**

Encouraging Citizenship

Houston Middle School students are encouraged and challenged daily to be informed, inquisitive, active, and involved members of the community and the world in which they live. A character education program provides weekly exploratory character education classes for all sixth grade students. Seventh and eighth grade students participate in character education lessons at least weekly as part of their social studies curriculum. Newly implemented peer mediation training enhances the character education program. The Tigers Taking Action community service club also adds to the character education program, giving students the opportunity to reflect on the needs of their school and their community. Recent activities have included raking leaves for elderly citizens, visiting the local nursing home armed with gifts for Valentine's Day, raising funds for Relay for Life, and collecting canned goods for the local food pantry.

Incentives to Achieve

Houston Middle School's extensive incentive program, 100% Student Success, helps to ensure that students achieve at the highest possible level. The program recognizes students with positive, tangible incentives in the areas of academic achievement, attendance, and citizenship (attitude). Incentives for academics include publication of a quarterly honor roll, a field trip for all students who achieve their quarterly Accelerated Reader goal, and a trip to a St. Louis Cardinal baseball game for students with high MAP scores. Incentives for perfect attendance include a drawing to win a trip to Pizza Hut for a buffet lunch. Students with perfect attendance for the entire school year receive a free activities pass to attend all Houston R-I school activities for the next school year. Teachers provide students who model good behavior with free coupons for ice cream in the cafeteria or other small incentives. Each quarter a model citizenship reward, such as an afternoon in the park, going bowling, or attending a movie at a local theater, is provided for all students who have had no discipline referrals and who have no failing quarter grades.

Clearly, these incentives have resulted in student success. The Houston Middle School has met adequate yearly progress requirements and has demonstrated significant increases in MAP scores. At the same time, average daily attendance has increased, and the number of student disciplinary referrals has decreased.

Houston Middle School strives to meet the unique developmental needs of all middle school students within a nurturing, academic climate.